

Emma Chapman

Interview with Emma Chapman

—*Mary A. Poole*

Living in a small room in the rear of a house at 361 Augusta Street, Mobile, Alabama, the writer located an interesting ex-slave, Emma Chapman, who when first approached was somewhat reticent. I soon learned I had arrived just as she was ready to have her breakfast, which consisted of bread and coffee, and insisted she eat first and talk afterwards, as she had made just about enough fire in the open fireplace to boil the coffee.

While she followed my suggestion I glanced about the room and found it very neat and tidy and an unusually comfortable looking double bed, a mirrored door chifferobe and two trunks, one rocking chair and a couple of straight chairs, a table containing all cooking utensils and food containers. The walls were covered with sheets of manilla wrapping paper, tacked on, and part of the ceiling patched with odds and ends of corrugated paper. Emma is small in stature, of light complexion with greying hair arranged in neat braids around her head, very clean in appearance.

Emma said she was about 13 years of age at the time of the surrender, and that she was born on the plantation of Rev. Mr. Montgomery Curry of Charleston, S.C. When she was about 3 years of age Mr. Curry moved to Pickens County, Alabama, about 5 miles from Carrollton and 8 miles from Pickenville. When I asked why they moved to Alabama, Emma laughed, and said they expected to find money growing on trees in Alabama, and that she as a child came near being "snake bit" many a time, digging around the roots of old trees, trying to find money.

Rev. Montgomery Curry, said Emma, was married to Ann Haynie, whose parents were Aaron and Francis Hudson Haynie, and Emma's grandmother was Lucy Linier, who was born in Virginia and was sold to Mr. Haynie to pay a debt. Lucy Linier was nurse for his daughter Ann and when she married Mr. Curry, she brought Lucy with her to her new home. The Currys had three children, a boy and two girls, and it was Lucy Linier's daughter, Patsy, who acted as their nurse.

The home of Rev. and Mrs. Montgomery Curry was a two-story log house with wide open hall running the entire length of the house and with rooms opening off either side. The kitchen was out a short distance from the main house, with the dairy between the two, under a large hickory tree.

The slave quarters were also built of logs, with space between for a shed room and small garden plot and a few chickens. The slave women did not go to the fields on Saturday as that was their day to clean up around their homes. They usually washed their clothes at night and hung them on the bushes where they were left to dry in the sunshine, maybe a couple of days, as no one could or would disturb them.

Rev. Montgomery Curry was a Baptist preacher and had no overseer, except Lucy Linier and her husband, Emma's grandparents, who kept a supervision over the slaves about 40 in number. There was no whipping allowed on the Curry plantation, and after the death of Reverend Curry, Mrs. Ann Curry (his

widow) ran the plantation under the same system. The patrollers had no jurisdiction over the Curry slaves, they were given permits by the Currys to go and come, and Emma said if one of those patrollers whipped one of "ole Miss's slaves, she would have sure sued them.

Emma laughingly said the slaves on other plantations always said the Curry slaves were "free niggers," as they could always get permits, and had plenty to eat and milk to drink. The slaves cooked their breakfasts in their own cabins, but dinner and supper was cooked in the kitchen and each came with their pan to be filled and had their own gourds which were grown on the place to drink their milk and of which they could have full and plenty.

During the war they cooked for the Confederate soldiers encamped nearby and great quantities were prepared. Emma was one of those delegated to carry the food to the camp. All she ever saw of the Yankees were two who stopped at the house and asked for something to eat. Mrs. Montgomery invited them in and served the best she had. One of the men wanted to take the last mule she had and the other said "No, Mrs. Montgomery is a widow and from the appearance of her slaves she has treated them well."

Mrs. Montgomery told them that someone had stolen her saddle horse and the soldier who had remonstrated with the other replied: "Madam, your saddle horse will be returned in three weeks," and sure enough, one night about midnight they heard a horse whinny and Emma's grandfather said "there is old Spunk," and there was old Spunk waiting outside.

Emma said the first whipping she ever had, was after the Surrender, given her by her own father when they left Alabama and went to live near Columbus, Miss.

She had always lived in the house with the "old Miss" and her young Miss, and when she had to leave them, she cried and so did they.

Her grandmother Lucy Linier nursed "Miss Ann"; Lucy's daughter Patsy nursed "Miss Ann's" children, and was the special property of Fannie Montgomery Curry, who married a Mr. Sidney Lipscomb and whose children Emma helped to look after, so the three generations were interwoven.

Emma only wishes she could go back to plantation days. All her trials and suffering came after she left "Ole Miss," and went to live with her father and mother, George and Patsy Curry, who had fourteen children and of which Emma was the eldest. Her father who was a quadroon in cast was cruel to his family, and especially so to her. He made her work like a man, cutting timber, splitting rails, digging, planting and all work of the farm.

Now, Emma is the only member of her family left. She married three times, having only two children, a girl and a boy, these by her last husband, Frank Chapman, now dead, and Emma has no knowledge of her children's whereabouts. She gave them an education so they could write to her if they wanted to. The girl married and left Mobile, the boy went to Chicago, was chauffeur for some rich folks. His last letter several years ago, in which he enclosed \$25.00, stated he was going on a trip to Jerusalem with one of the young men of the family.